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SUBJECT: Ambassador Discusses Iraq Reconstruction,
Public Health, and IPR With Health Minister

Summary

1. (SBU) In their first meeting, Health Minister Recep Akdag told the Ambassador that Turkey wanted to contribute to Iraq reconstruction by building hospitals in Kirkuk and Baghdad. He identified decreasing infant/childbirth mortality, public education on AIDS/HIV and curbing smoking as public health priorities. The Ambassador raised data exclusivity and other problems in the pharmaceuticals industry. The Minister acknowledged that he was following the data exclusivity issue closely, but did not state his views on whether and when Turkey would implement protection. End Summary.

Building Hospitals in Iraq

2. (SBU) The Minister told the Ambassador that Turkey wanted to assist Iraq's health system by building small hospitals in Kirkuk and Baghdad. He noted that several members of parliament recently visited Iraq as part of a Turkish Red Crescent delegation to investigate possible assistance, and that work had already begun on a hospital for Kirkuk. Akdag said that security and finance are constraints to expanding aid in this area. Noting that he had recently met one of the MPs involved in these projects, the Ambassador responded that he welcomed Turkey's contribution in reconstruction of Iraq's health sector.

Public Health Issues

3. (U) Infant/Childbirth Mortality: The Minister stated that continued high infant and maternal mortality in childbirth are serious problems, particularly in eastern and southeastern Turkey. The GOT is trying to address the problem through higher salaries for health service providers in those areas and introducing a family physician system in Turkey. Akdag said the GOT also aims to encourage more breastfeeding of infants.

4. (U) AIDS: He said there are only 1,600 registered AIDS cases in Turkey, but the true number is higher. Akdag identified foreign tourists and sex workers as contributing to the spread of AIDS in Turkey. He opined that the Turkish public is not well-informed about the disease, and said the Ministry would increase public information efforts in the coming year.

5. (U) Other Issues: Akdag said Turkish legislation on smoking in public areas is restrictive, but not well-enforced. He said the Ministry was working on an anti-smoking campaign. Other important issues are clean drinking water, a problem especially in rural areas, and air quality, improved in recent years through greater use of natural gas.

Pharmaceuticals and Intellectual Property

6. (SBU) The Ambassador raised problems facing research-

based pharmaceuticals manufacturers, particularly lack of data exclusivity protection, price controls, transparency and the possibility that patent protection could be watered down. The Ambassador pointed out that these problems are emerging as obstacles in our bilateral relationship in the context of the Special 301 review of intellectual property rights (IPR) protection, as well as in Turkey's aspirations to join the European Union. The Ambassador acknowledged the GOT's need to curb health care costs, but urged Akdag to bear in mind the long-term costs of weak IPR protection as foreign pharmaceuticals manufacturers may opt not to launch new drugs in Turkey in the future. Weak IPR protection also undermines the GOT's efforts to strengthen the investment climate and attract foreign investment. The Ambassador urged the Minister to meet with research-based companies and to take their views into account in formulating pharmaceuticals sector policy.

17. (SBU) The Minister agreed on the importance of transparent policies and said he had met with representatives of the research-based drug manufacturers association on these issues. He said he was following the data exclusivity issue closely, but that the Health Ministry was only one of several agencies sitting on a GOT commission to decide on a course of action.

18. (SBU) In response to a question from the Ambassador on bioequivalence of generic drugs, the Minister responded that the Ministry will exclude from reimbursement pharmaceuticals which do not pass a review of bioequivalence with the original medication. Akdag said he has accelerated review of bioequivalence applications, claiming that he has approved more drugs in his seven months as Minister than during the previous three years.
Edelman